

Corrective Action Requirements for Milwaukee Public Schools
District in Need of Improvement
Background
(Draft 6/02/09)

The people of Milwaukee and throughout Wisconsin are coming together around the shared responsibility and sustained effort to ensure a quality education for every child in Milwaukee.

In the past years, the community has stepped forward to support Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) through numerous groups and multiple reviews of the school district's instructional program, practices, and student achievement have occurred. All have had the primary goal to support academic success for the children of Milwaukee. Nationally-recognized organizations, community-organized councils, and district-convened committees have produced a series of reports that have identified areas of concern. "Raising Achievement in the Milwaukee Public Schools: Report of the Strategic Support Team of the Council of Great City Schools," "African American Education Report 2007," "Working Together, Achieving More: District Strategic Plan," and "Toward a Stronger Milwaukee Public Schools" by McKinsey & Company outline the steps to ensure that all MPS students have access to a comprehensive, quality education provided by an efficient and effective school district.

The above reports are strong calls for transformation of MPS from peers and from the community; however, those calls are now underscored by the required federal sanctions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the *Jamie S.* settlement approved by the federal district court. In short, the calls for transformation have now become requirements to transform.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is required by the ESEA to annually identify schools and districts that did not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward meeting the state's established objectives in four areas. These objectives include:

- Testing 95 percent of their enrolled students in the statewide reading and mathematics assessment;
- Meeting state established proficiency targets in reading based on Wisconsin's statewide test;
- Meeting state established proficiency targets in mathematics based on Wisconsin's statewide standardized test;
- Maintaining a high school graduation rate of at least 80 percent of the statewide average and elementary and middle school attendance rates of at least 85 percent of the statewide average, or show growth.

Milwaukee Public Schools has not made adequate yearly progress for five consecutive years in reading and mathematics at the elementary, middle, and high school grade spans. MPS once again did not meet AYP in reading and mathematics for the 2008-09 school year and is now a DIFI-Level 4.

Under ESEA, the DPI has required MPS to take corrective action designed to meet the goal of having all students achieve at the proficient and advanced student academic achievement levels.

Previous corrective action requirements have laid a strong foundation and progress has been made; however, a more aggressive approach is needed to address the urgency, magnitude, and complexity surrounding the district's performance.

In 2007, the DPI directed the district to restructure its organization through the MPS District and School Accountability Model. This directive was based upon information from multiple sources including the Council of Great Cities Schools which described MPS as "a system of schools, not a school system." A system of central accountability, too long absent from MPS, is essential to ensure that strategies to improve student achievement are consistently implemented in every MPS building. Under the District and School Accountability Model, MPS grouped its 207 schools into nine clusters to ensure communities of learning, quality of instruction, and accountability in every building. While the district has made progress in implementing these "System of Support" clusters, the district must strengthen this effort. The district must define more specifically who reports to whom in each of the nine clusters and how supervisors within the clusters are assigned duties. Further, the district must make clear that responsibility for oversight of each of the nine clusters rests directly with the MPS superintendent.

This accountability model is also essential to implement the court-approved *Jamie S.* settlement. The federal district court found that MPS systemically violated student rights in its use of suspension. The district's use of suspension was also identified as a serious concern by the Council of Great City Schools. Suspension exacerbates the district's student attendance problem and leads to lower student achievement and graduation rates. Research tells us that an effective educational system must provide a system of early intervening services PK-12 to address the academic and behavioral needs of all students before students fail. The *Jamie S.* settlement is based on this research. Under the settlement and as corrective action to address its DIFI status under ESEA, MPS must develop and implement a system of coordinated early intervening services PK-12 in every MPS school.

In 2008-09, MPS received \$121.7 million of federal entitlement funds through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Carl Perkins Act. MPS also received an additional \$25 million of federal discretionary grants through the DPI.

For 2009-10, MPS is expected to receive at least \$126 million in federal entitlement funds plus at least \$95.6 million in federal funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

Beginning in 2009-10, the State Superintendent will appoint a federal funds trustee who will serve as an inspector general for use of federal funds by MPS and provide increased fiscal oversight over the numerous federal grants the district receives. The trustee will also meet at least quarterly with the Milwaukee Innovation and Improvement Advisory Council to provide council members, the State Superintendent, MPS officials, and the public with greater understanding of MPS' use of federal funds. The federal funds trustee will also work in concert with other DPI staff to assure that the district fulfills benchmarks with the 2009-10 corrective action requirements.

To raise achievement, close achievement gaps, and ensure that every student in MPS graduates from high school, specific corrective actions are required to:

- Increase student attendance and graduation rates;
- Ensure a system of quality and consistency in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, using a system of early intervening services PK-12 for all students. The system must be approved by the independent expert appointed by the federal district court to carry out the *Jamie S.* settlement; and,
- Ensure a consistent, transparent, and high quality system of accountability in Milwaukee Public Schools for school improvement, teacher quality, and financial and operational management.